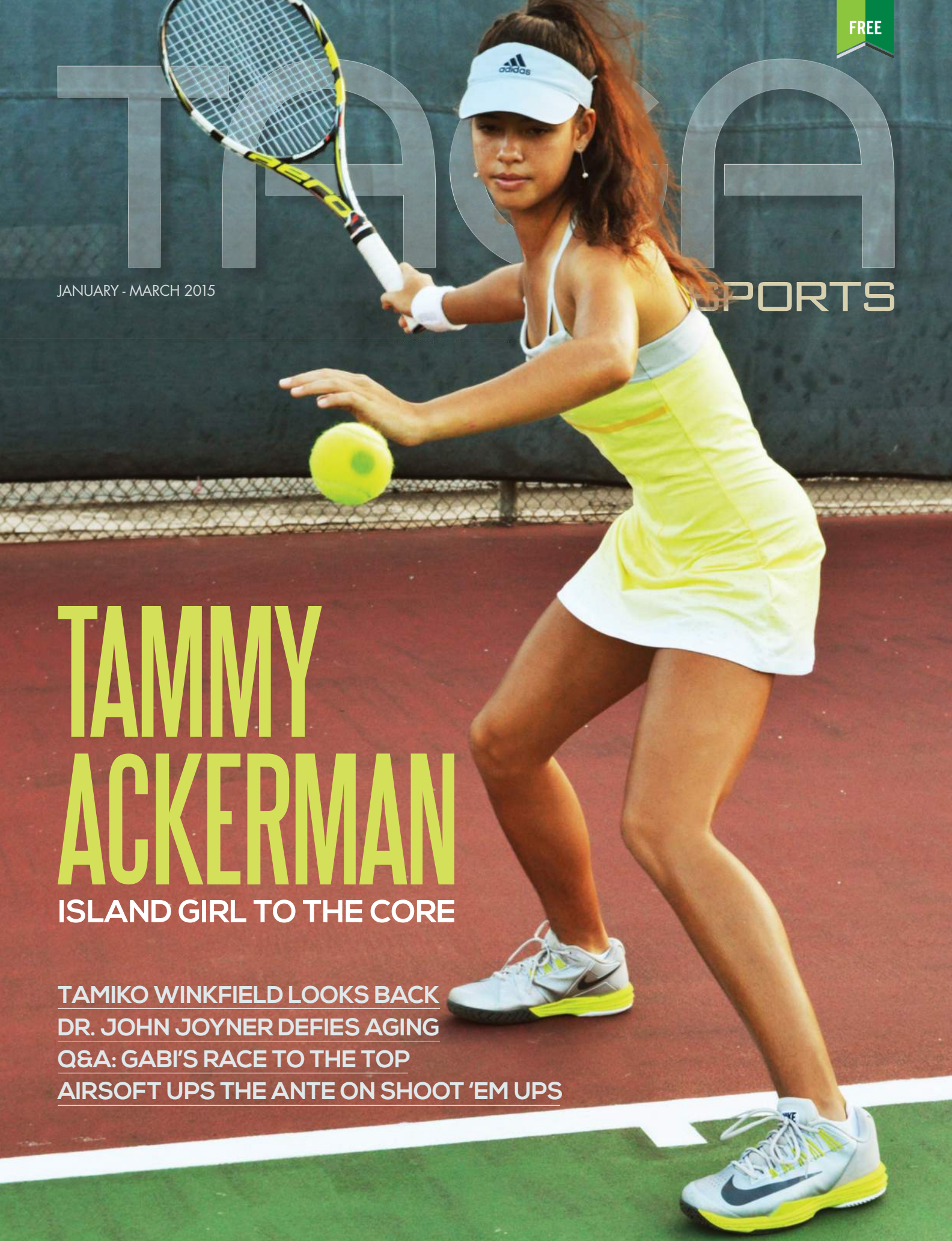

FREE

TASCA SPORTS

JANUARY - MARCH 2015

TAMMY ACKERMAN

ISLAND GIRL TO THE CORE

TAMIKO WINKFIELD LOOKS BACK

DR. JOHN JOYNER DEFIES AGING

Q&A: GABI'S RACE TO THE TOP

AIRSOFT UPS THE ANTE ON SHOOT 'EM UPS

Tan Holdings

Tan Siu Lin Foundation

2015

SPORTS CALENDAR

JANUARY

MISO Boys Basketball League: High school teams from both private and public schools compete in the varsity and junior varsity basketball.

MISO Girls Volleyball League: Private and public high school squads battle for girls volleyball crown.

Saipan Little League Baseball: Around 30 teams fight for four division titles, Major, Junior, Senior, and Big League. Games are played at the Francisco "Tan Ko" Palacios and Miguel "Basa" Pangelinan ballfields.

Saipan Baseball League: Seven teams compete for the championship, which the Brewers held for the last two seasons.

FEBRUARY

NMSA Annual Awards Banquet: Northern Marianas Sports Association hails the top athletes, officials, and coaches for the 2014 season.

Coconut Tennis Classic: The second junior tennis tournament under the 2014-2015 calendar of Northern Mariana Islands Tennis Association.

Sun Palace Hotel Singles and Doubles Badminton Competition: The tournament kicks off Northern Marianas Badminton Association's calendar of events for 2015.

NMIFA Spring Youth League: Teams in the co-ed U12, girls and boys U15 and boys U18 battle for the spring championship, while U6, U8, and U10 squads play in non-competitive games at various school pitches on Saipan.

MARCH

PIC Tennis Championships: Another Northern Mariana Islands Tennis Association-sanctioned event and is one of the longest tennis competitions on the island. Pacific Islands Club Saipan is the main sponsor.

XTERRA Saipan Championship: The off-road triathlon event features some of the best triathletes in the world with the top local bets aiming to share the spotlight with the visiting participants.

Tagaman Triathlon: A longer triathlon race (on road) that also pits off-island athletes against the CNMI's best.

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Our featured athlete in this edition, Tammy Ackerman, has been based in Thailand since 2013 yet still represents the Northern Marianas each time she competes in Junior ITF events in Asia. As she says it, "Inside I still feel like an island girl." That pretty much sums up the sentiment of most anyone born here who've moved elsewhere. The draw of the CNMI has such resonance, bone-deep and obdurate, that people who've settled elsewhere still feel the tug of the islands, maintaining ties that remain unbroken and uninterrupted despite time and distance. ***See story on Page 12***

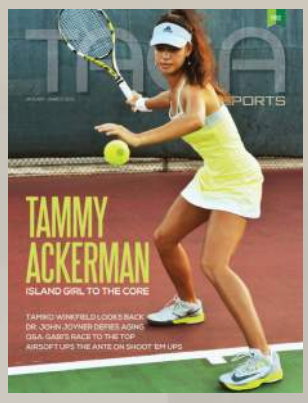
This month's edition of TAGA *Sports* also features another up-and-coming female athlete for our Q&A section, Gabrielle "Gabi" Race. The daughter of renowned tennis coach Jeff Race, you'd think Gabi would focus on and excel in tennis alone but this 16-year-old is actually making a name for herself in basketball and athletics and names soccer her favorite sport. She's got spunk, she's got personality, and she's got the chops to actually excel in these diverse sports. We all have high hopes for Gabi! ***See story on Page 10***

The halçyon days of young boys playing cowboys and Indians has certainly come a long way, this time with grown-up men in battle outfits and masks playing shoot-'em-ups with Airsoft—replica weapons that shoot pellets. They're non-fatal but they will certainly leave a bruise that'll last for days. Though not strictly a sport, Airsoft aficionados swear by the full body workout—and adrenaline rush—they get each time they go off on their weekend games. Sundays are not just off to the golf ranges anymore, sonny boy! ***Story on Page 18***

And be sure to check out our short feature on Dr. John Joyner, who is a living embodiment of the benefits one gains from living an active lifestyle. At almost 90 years old, Dr. Joyner breaks all octogenarian stereotypes, with the bearing of a man in the prime of his life. As he says it, "What we tend to forget is physical activity is an essential part of the lives of every human being." ***Story on Page 24***

We hope you'll enjoy this latest edition of TAGA *Sports*. As usual, you are free to rave and rant, complain, or point out any mistakes. Or better yet, you can offer suggestions and tips for future topics. Just email them to editor@saipantribune.com and we'll be sure to consider them at our next editorial meeting. Ciao!

JAYVEE VALLEJERA
editor@saipantribune.com
Editor



COVER ART
Tammy Ackerman takes a swing at a tennis ball during practice.

Photography by
ROSELYN MONROYO

TAGA SPORTS
VOLUME 5 NO. 18
JANUARY - MARCH 2015

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TAGA Sports is published quarterly by the Saipan Tribune Inc. with offices on the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan

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KAISAANDERSON

Kaisa is a Registered Dietitian originally from Utah. She loves the tropical weather all year round of Saipan, but does miss skiing and snowboarding in the snowy Rocky Mountains.

THOMASMANGLONA II

Thomas is a Mount Carmel School junior, writes for the *Saipan Tribune* and *North Star*, and is the editor-in-chief for his school's Journalism Club. This 16-year-old has a burning passion for journalism, enjoys meeting new people, going to new places, and capturing important community moments.

ROSELYNMONROYO

Roselyn was once hooked on "Royal Rampage," which inspired her to try Airsoft and do a story on Saipan's "Weekend Warriors." Someday, she hopes to do scuba diving to feast on the island's rich marine life.

JONPEREZ

Becoming a priest was once his dream and he briefly entered several seminaries in the Philippines to get a feel of religious life. But since he was just 15 years old back then, the priests advised him to pursue college. He enrolled at the University of the East where he joined the official student newspaper and the rest was history.

MARKRABAGO

Tamiko Winkfield was part of the CNMI delegation that Mark covered during the 2003 South Pacific Mini Games in Suva, Fiji. He covered Winkfield as she competed in swimming under Saipan Swim Club coach and CNMI Sports Hall of Famer Bill Sakovich. Winkfield is now the ukulele teacher of Mark's daughter, Maxine, at Saipan Community School.

JIMRAYPHAND

Jim lived his early years on Lukunor, a small atoll of the Mortlock Islands, with his paternal relatives many of who, though long gone, have left him with a deep sense of appreciation for the daily grind of sustainable, subsistence living off the land and the ocean of our beautiful islands. The allure of an island life such as it was during his childhood remains as his life-long goal, perhaps in retirement, if he should be lucky enough to live that long.

Email letters to the editor to editor@saipantribune.com or mail to PMB 34, P.O. Box 10001, Saipan MP 96950. Submissions to TAGA Sports must include the writer's name, village address (no P.O. boxes), and daytime phone or mobile number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity and may be published or used in any medium. All submissions become the property of the publication and will not be returned.

CFL helps nurture American football in the region

JON PEREZ
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

CNMI Sharks running back Derrick Rangamar, 5, avoids the tackle of a Philippine Punishers player, partly hidden, while two of his teammates look on in a goodwill match last year in Manila.

The Commonwealth Football League Association will be playing Big Brother to the Philippines and other East Asian countries to further promote and strengthen the sport in the region.

CFLA chair John Blanco said that playing two exhibition games against the Philippine Punishers in Manila was part of their plan to introduce the gridiron to sports-loving Filipinos.

And organizing an annual regional competition between the CNMI, Guam, the Philippines, and the Chinese teams from Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong is also on its planning stages.

"We're in constant contact with them, through email and Facebook. And they are trying to build the sport. Like the Punishers, we also plan to play against teams."

Korea and Japan, Blanco added, also started organizing American-style football in their respective countries but they have yet to get in touch with their respective organizers. "Hopefully we can bring them in the fold soon."

Blanco said American football is relatively new and often misunderstood in countries like China and the Philippines. "When you mention football to them, the first thing they could think of is soccer."

"And they see how the sport is played. They think it's too violent. The violent nature of the sport is one thing that turns them off, that's why they don't want to try and play it. But now they're trying to see the other side of it."

Blanco said the violent nature of the sport is obviously a misconception. "Rugby is almost the same as football, and there's no gear and it is a different way of tackling."

Filipinos are now learning to play with the pigskin and Blanco believes American football will also make its mark in the Philippines.

"It's picking up in the Philippines, just like combat sports [mixed martial arts]. It is trying to take off now. We are seeing a shift and a lot of Filipinos can also excel in football. They can do this," Blanco said.

Although big guys usually play football, he believes Filipinos can also excel in the sport. "Yes it's a sport for burly guys but a lot of small guys can play it too. Filipinos have shown that they are actually good at it. They now have two different teams and two different leagues in the Philippines. Now they are trying to form a women's team. It's slowly growing in the Philippines."

Aside from the CNMI, the Guam American Football Association is also helping out the Philippines in trying to establish the sport.

"It is a mutually beneficial arrangement. The Philippines also regularly plays against Guam. [A Guam team] regularly flies to the Philippines. Guam is also very supportive and provides a lot of assistance," Blanco said.

He said the Punishers were still in a celebratory mood despite suffering a 72-0 thrashing in an exhibition game last August at the University of the Philippines Oval Field that avenged their 13-6 loss two years ago.

"Even after we beat them they are still a lively bunch and they didn't back down until the very end. There's a lot of spirit in them, they are not intimidated and they are there to fight and give their best," said Blanco.

Blanco believes American football will stay and continue to have a following in the Philippines. "They are trying to make this happen. They are a lot more active than we are."

"After our game in August, they hosted a clinic and now they are trying to put together a women's league and they can compete against Guam since Guam has a couple of women's teams."

Aside from the Punishers, the Philippine Aguilas have also taken flight. "They [Aguilas] are part of the Arena bowl Philippines. They look pretty solid and organized so we are also looking forward to playing against them."

The CNMI and Guam have also planned to have a coordinated effort of holding a coaching clinic and develop the youth program in the Philippines.

"We also plan to bring our youth teams in the Philippines to play against each other or play against a couple of Filipino teams. We also talked to flag football organizers in Manila, we're also talking about doing clinics."

With a lot of people getting involved and pitching their ideas, a lot of plans are slowly taking shape in football to further its growth in the Philippines. "Everything is still in the planning stage but we're sure all of it will take place in the future," Blanco said. TS

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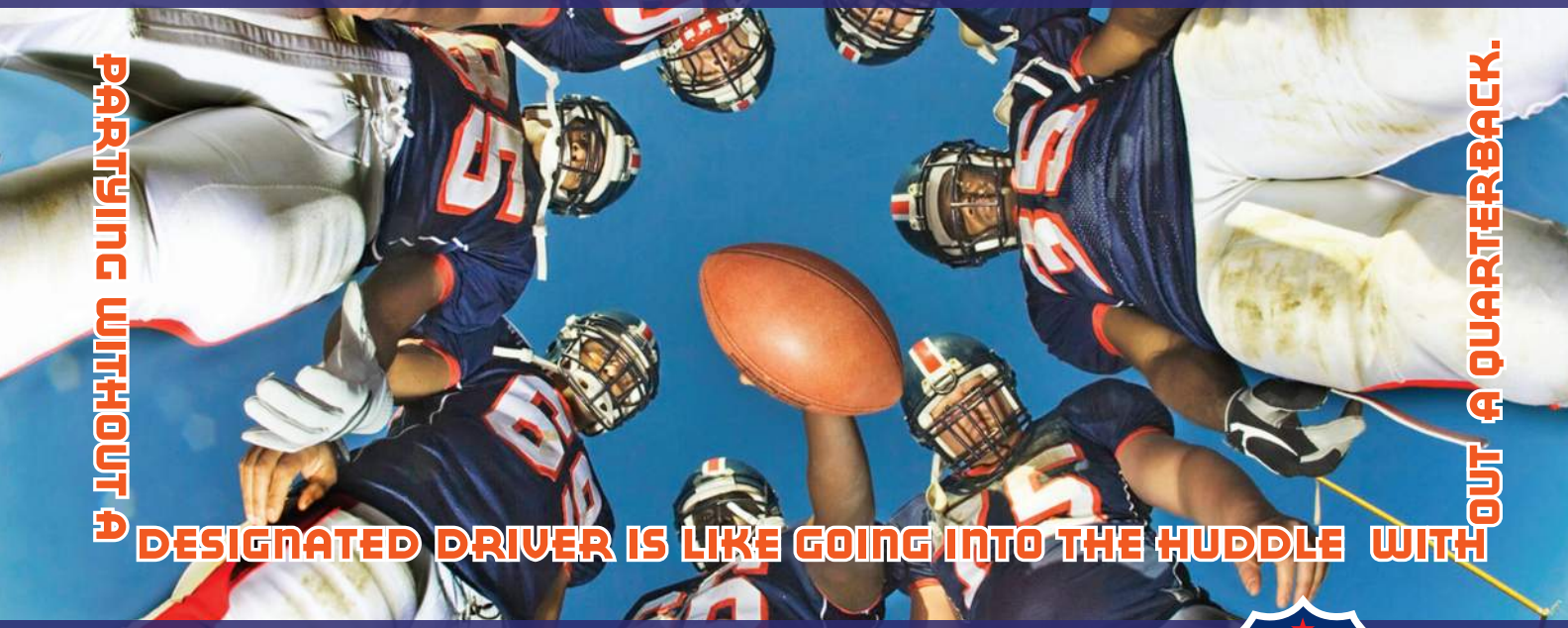

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5 reasons to quit protein powder

KAISA ANDERSON
Contributing Writer

Have you ever found yourself in the following scenario: You just had a great strength training work out at the gym. It's time to fuel up your body and muscles for growth. So you whip out your blender to make that chalky, grainy, doesn't-taste-like-chocolate protein powder smoothie you gulp every day, right? That sounds disgusting. What if I told you there are some better options for a pre- and post-workout snack, and it's not protein powder? Let's take a look at why protein powder isn't all its "chalked" up to be.

POST WORKOUT FRUIT SMOOTHIE

- 8 oz. low-fat Greek Yogurt, flavored or plain
- 1 cup frozen fruit
- 1 tbsp. ground flaxseed

1. Add the ingreadients to the blender in the following order; Greek yogurt, frozen fruit, ground flaxseed, and almond milk as needed.
2. Blend on high till all ingredients are combined and smooth; add more almond milk as needed to create desired consistency of smoothie. Enjoy!

Source: Saint Mary's Center for Health & Fitness

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1 You probably aren't deficient.

Most athletes are not deficient in protein body stores or intake. Goodness gracious, your average person is most likely not deficient! The truth is supplementing your diet with protein powder is not necessary, because your body can't process or use all of it. The average recommended daily intake of protein each day is 40 to 60 grams. This serving translates into eating two large chicken breasts. This is not very much, right? Most protein powder scoops contain 24 grams of protein; then add your Paleo diet and you've had enough grams of protein for three days.

2 The extra protein is wasted.

There are two places excess protein goes after your recommended needs are met. The excess protein can be converted into molecules for energy if your calorie intake was low for the day. The alternative route is for the excess protein to be converted into fat. Yes, fat. Isn't this the reason you were at the gym anyway, to lose excess fat and lean out? A study from the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, conducted over a 12-week period of time, showed men who supplemented with protein pre- and post-workout had no effect on increased muscle growth. Overall, excessive protein will not repair or make your biceps grow faster.

3 Carbohydrates are used first for muscle repair.

Let's say you had a leak in your roof, and you have all the materials to fix this leak. However, this leak will go without being fixed if no one were to take the materials and tools, climb on the roof, and manually fix the leak. It's the same for your muscles; your muscles will never recover if you don't feed them some energy (roof repairman) so the protein (roof materials) can be utilized to repair the muscle tears that occur from strength training. It's recommended to have a post-workout snack or meal that has a 3:1 ratio of carbohydrates to protein.

4 Your body prefers actual food.

It is known—protein from a juicy steak compared to a processed powder will be more easily absorbed during digestion. It is commonly found that foods in their natural form have a better relationship with your gut, allowing for more nutrients to pass into your body for nourishment. Not only do naturally containing protein foods have better absorption of protein, but offer more vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients that protein powders often lack and can't be fortified with.

5 Protein powder is less effective.

Most of the protein powders are highly processed through a mechanically and high temperature manufacturing. This naturally unwinds the protein molecule. Your body would normally unwind the protein molecules you eat to make new molecules, repair cells, and build larger proteins and repair muscles. By eating processed protein powder, it's likely you are eating more nitrates as a result of the processing that actual protein. And in turn, nitrates are somewhat toxic to your body in excessive amounts.

Overall, protein powder is not a bad thing, and can be handy when you are short on time. But the best practice is eating a regular diet that meets your body's energy and nutritional needs. I recommend quitting the religious practice of drinking a chalky tasting, grainy, ineffective protein powder drink every time you finish working out. Who wants to do this anyway when you can eat REAL food? A quick alternative for a post-workout snack is low-fat chocolate milk, or even better, the homemade smoothie recipe below, and keep on lifting!

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FEATURES

Meet the captain of Tan Holdings U18 soccer team

THOMAS MANGLONA II
Contributing Writer

Sean Hikaru Hayakawa Perez lives by the saying "work hard, play hard." As an avid soccer athlete and student, Perez strives to focus on his studies while training and working diligently to build his momentum and bring new techniques to help his team season after season on the soccer pitch.

Sean Hikaru Hayakawa Perez, front row second left, poses for a photo with his team members before going head to head with Guam's Strykerz soccer team.

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Printing funded by the Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Grant under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Service Administration.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Sean Hikaru Hayakawa Perez, first from left, front row, poses with the Tan Holdings men's soccer team.

Sean Perez: 'I will never give up on this sport'

The Mount Carmel School senior says he first fell in love with the sport when he was 4 years old.

"I remember seeing a ball with black and white spots when I was 4 and started to kick it. Ever since I was a kid I played soccer and I have loved it and when I was little it felt like I knew what I was doing," he told TAGA *Sports*.

Since making his first kick as a toddler, Perez has evolved into a notable athlete on Saipan. As a member of the Northern Marianas Islands Football Association, the 17-year-old has represented the islands in several U15, U18, U19, and Men's National and All Star competitions. Perez has also led his team to victory in various local tournaments.

It's more than making the perfect goal that matters to this accomplished student athlete.

"The game is about developing my leadership skills and keeping my team motivated."

As captain of the Tan Holdings U-18 soccer team, Perez said he continuously strives to conjure up methods of team building. It is important, he said, to make every individual on the team feel important.

The young athlete's skill and mindset have paid off as he has received dozens of accolades from various sports organizations. As a striker, Perez has been awarded several Golden Boot awards for being the top scorer on his team.

Perez draws inspiration from world-famous athletes.

"Seeing their gifts and talents is just amazing," he added. "But they weren't born to be the best, it is just a matter of training 110 percent on and off the field; giving up is never an option. Giving up is easy, but those players never had it in their minds to quit. They did what they love and look where it has gotten them."

He attributes much of his success to his parents, Glen and Suzi Perez. Without his parents' support, Perez said that he would not be playing the sport.

He admits that he wanted to quit at one point because of a difficult season, but because of his parents' strong encouragement, he remained a member of the team and since then has honed his skills.

"Knowing that I have the support from my friends, family, and coaches makes me continue to do what I love," he explained. "My parents have always said to me that I have this gift of being a soccer player and that is what I say to myself before the start of my game and after. I will never give up on this sport."

After graduating from high school next year, he plans to pursue his dream of becoming a nurse and professional soccer player. Perez hopes to return to the island to mentor youth players about sports and share his passion for soccer.

"It is my dream to see the youth players grow and receive the best training, so soccer can live forever in the NMI," he said.

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GABI'S RACE TO THE TOP

ROSELYN MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writern

PERSONAL INFO

Complete Name: **Gabrielle Rose Race**
Age: **16**
School: **Marianas High School**
Village: **I-Denni, Capital Hill**

Gabrielle "Gabi" Race was one of the Northern Marianas Sports Association's top student-athlete awardees last year. She won the NMSA Tan Siu Lin Foundation Student Athlete of the Month (November) plum for her outstanding showing in basketball and athletics. She is also into volleyball, soccer, and swimming and played tennis, too.

TAGA *Sports* talked to Gabi to find out how the daughter of the CNMI's respected coach and tennis player Jeff Race got into multiple sports.

What was the first sport you learned to play?

I am pretty sure that tennis was the first sport I played and I obviously started that because of my dad. I did enjoy playing tennis, but when I got older and started playing more sports, I realized I enjoyed the other sports more.

You're the daughter of a well-know athlete/coach, not only in the CNMI but in the entire Pacific, so do you feel the pressure of delivering good results when you compete?

How do you handle that pressure? What words of encouragement do you get from your dad when you compete?

I haven't really thought of it that way. I know he will be proud of me for giving my best effort. But, generally, good results come from trying your hardest so they go hand-in-hand. He has a lot of sayings he likes to tell me and all of his students, like "Never, ever give up" and "You have to be in it to win it."

Which of all the sports you play do you like most?

My favorite sport is definitely soccer because it's fun, which is something people often forget matters. Soccer is also the sport that I am planning to pursue in college.

The most difficult or challenging sport you played?

I think I would have to say tennis. It is so technical and there is also a mental aspect to the game that takes many years to master.

Your most memorable/treasured tournament or win?

I cannot decide between the bronze medal I won in the 3,000m during the Oceania Area Championships in Tahiti and the CNMI women's national soccer team's win over Macau last summer. It was the first game that we have ever won in an official competition.

Any CNMI athlete (besides your dad) you look up to?

There are way too many to choose from. Over the years and through every sport there have been multiple people who have inspired me. Some of them are Jacque Wonenberg, Mamiko Oshima-Berger, and Megan Silberberger.

Your basketball coach once said he admires your work ethic, so how would you describe the Gabi we see once she starts playing?

I just always try to play my best. My dad has always told me to give 100 percent because then you did everything you could do, no matter what the outcome is. I am also a very competitive person and I know it shows when I play.

Have you ever thought or consider quitting sports?

I have never thought about quitting sports. I have been an athlete all my life and it just isn't an option for me. Playing sports is something that I enjoy doing, and it's also a fun way to stay healthy and fit.

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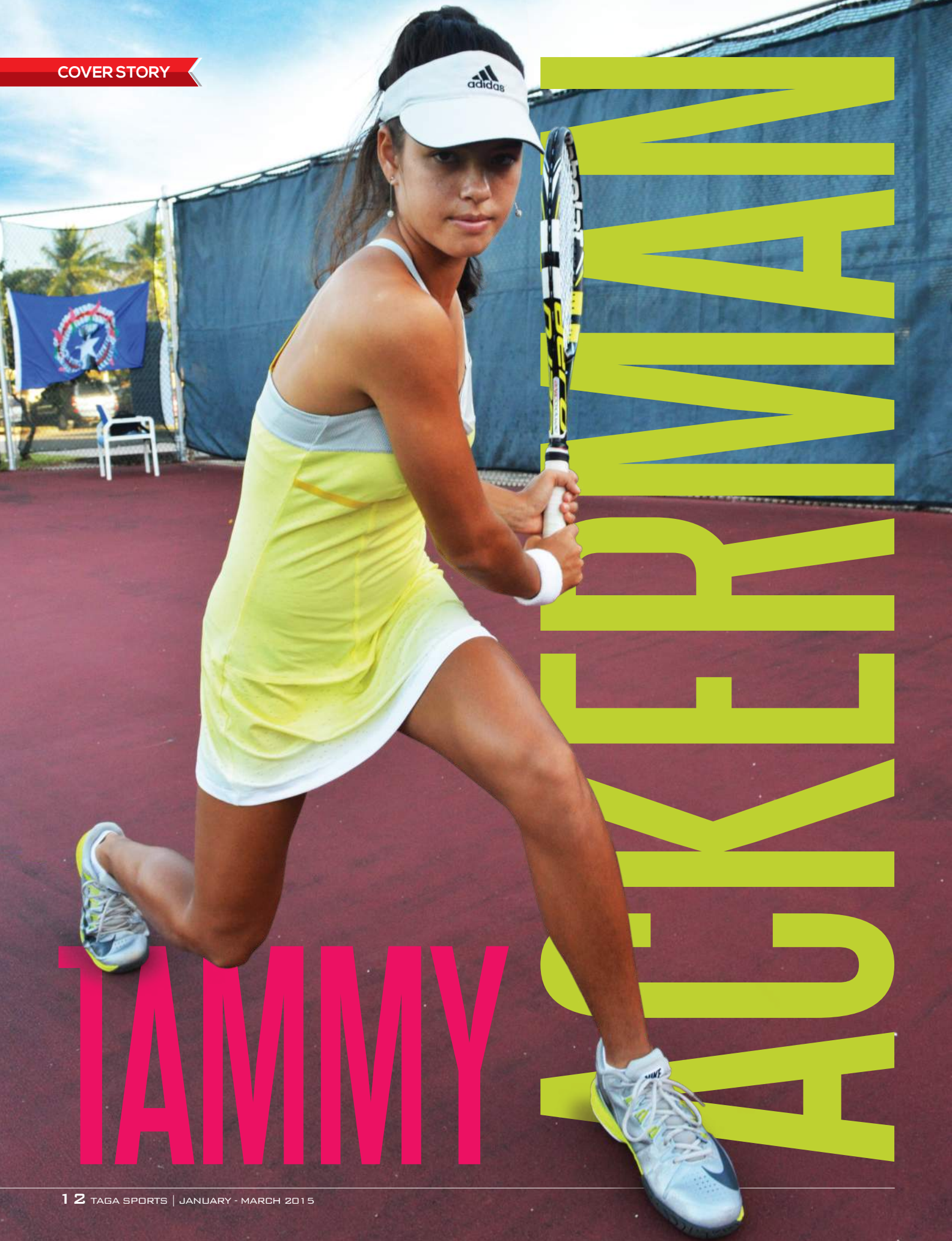

TAMMY ACKERMAN

AN ISLAND GIRL TO THE CORE

ROSELYN MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

With the way Tammy Ackerman played in Junior ITF events in Asia last year, it is not surprising that a tennis association in Bangkok has been badgering her to represent Thailand whenever she competes. But sorry, Tammy is representing the CNMI and she wants to keep it that way.

"Even though I no longer live in the CNMI, Saipan will always be home to me. The tennis association in Bangkok has asked me to represent Thailand in the Junior ITF tournaments many times as I also carry a Thai passport but I have always declined because inside I still feel like an island girl," Tammy said.

Tammy moved to Thailand, her mother's birth country, in early 2013 after completing her one-year stint at the ITF Training Centre in Fiji.

"The main reason for my relocation is I wanted to further continue and improve my tennis career. My family and I felt that Thailand would be an ideal place to do this because there are more tournaments and training opportunities. Since Thailand is so close to many other countries, it is much more convenient financially and location-wise to travel to other tournaments," the 15-year-old player said.

Once in Thailand, she was able to compete in Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Brunei, and also joined the Junior ITF events on Saipan and Guam to earn ranking points. As of Dec. 16, 2014, Tammy has gained 20 ranking points in singles and 50 in doubles. She was also ranked No. 1,056 in the world as of that same date and achieved her highest ranking (No. 1, 054) on Dec. 8, 2014.

The former Saipan Community School student made it to the quarterfinals of Grade 4 and 5 Junior ITF events five times, two times in the semis, and once in the finals (doubles). Tammy's finals appearance in the doubles event (with Uzbekistan's Sabina Smirnova and versus a Japanese and Chinese-Taipei pair) of the Rajshahi International Junior Tennis Championships 2014 in Bangladesh in November 2014 was the farthest a CNMI player reached in Junior ITF events.

Another highlight of Tammy's notable 2014 season was her second round win against Chinese-Taipei's Han-Chi Chen, who was then ranked in the 500s when they dueled in the Chang Thailand ITF Juniors G4 in June. Tammy earned her first singles rankings points (10) when she swept Chen, 6-1, 6-4.

"So far this [2014] has been my most successful tennis season, but it is just another step to improve and develop. Behind all of my accomplishments is my family. They are the ones who have always supported and encouraged me to be the best I can be. Nothing I do is possible without the constant strength and love from my parents

(Dan and Bunlert) and brother (Dylan). There are so many people who have assisted and inspired me in my journey so far. I could not possibly name them all, but I would like to give a shout out and big thanks to everyone who has ever coached and hit a tennis ball with me," Tammy said.

Missing home

With the time she spends traveling, training, and studying, Tammy rarely has a chance to visit home, missing a lot of things the island has to offer.

"There are so many things I miss on Saipan. There is not a minute of the day that I am not thinking about my family and friends. I miss seeing the ocean every day, I miss the lack of traffic, the quiet nature, and the days that are both rainy and sunny. I miss how the only reason people on Saipan honk their car horn is to greet friends. I miss the little things that make Saipan the unique island it is," said Tammy.

That nostalgia prompts her to share the beauty of the CNMI with every player she meets.

"At tournaments, people are always asking me, 'Where is CNMI?' I love answering and sharing with them the secret island of Saipan. I am proud to represent the CNMI every time I play and I hope my actions and accomplishments reflect on Saipan positively," she added.

Commercial model

The island girl is also a commercial model, as she is one of the athletes (the only one in tennis) featured in a Canon camera commercial shown in South and Southeast Asia.

"A couple of months ago I was given an opportunity to be a part of a Canon camera commercial. The director and producers were from Singapore and they were looking for a female Caucasian tennis player. Since they were shooting the commercial in Thailand, the Lawn Tennis Association of Thailand recommended me for the role. One afternoon the casting agents showed up at Impact Tennis Academy where I train and asked me to audition. After I auditioned I was called in to meet the director and I was told I got the part," said Tammy, whose photos and footages were taken by European Pressphoto Agency's Rungroj Yongrit.

The shooting was not easy and she was at first hesitant to accept the role.

"I actually did have second thoughts about filming the commercial because a couple days before the shoot I fell down and tore something in my back. I did not know if I would be able to play but I pushed through and tried my best. Everyone was very happy with the final results. The whole process of acting and auditioning was very exhilarating, but I still had a lot of fun," Tammy said.

"It was not until I first saw the finishing commercial and pictures that I was able to fully appreciate the surreal experience. Modeling has brought a whole new level of excitement to my lifestyle and I can't wait to explore the possibilities," she added.

Eye on the prize

Tammy will continue competing in Junior ITF events, which she believes will help her reach her goal—get a scholarship from a Division I university in the U.S.

"I have been more focused on developing my whole game in general. I have been building up my base with proper technique and movement. While I will continue working on these, I would also like to start incorporating more weapons into my game. I will also work on improving the mental and strategic aspects of my game. My goal is to gain a tennis scholarship to a Division I university in the U.S. This is not easy to accomplish but it is what I want and I will do everything I can to reach my goal," Tammy said.

"These junior ITF events are very important and helpful to me. In these tournaments I play against girls from all over the world and I get a chance to apply in my matches the things I have worked on in practices. Winning ITF points are important but in the end it is just a number. My main goal is that I learn from every match and I improve myself in the next one," added Tammy.

She is thankful, though, that she manages to play and study at the same time.

"One of the most difficult things for me is to find the balance between my school work and tennis. I attend a virtual school called Forest Trail Academy that is based in Florida. This basically means every moment a tennis racquet is not in my hand, I am logging in hours of schoolwork! When I am travelling to compete in tournaments it is hard to maintain a schedule but online school is very convenient because as long as I have my laptop I can go to school almost anywhere," she said.

Tammy hopes more CNMI youth players will also get a chance to travel and compete.

"Training and working hard are important but tournaments are where you can see how far you have come and what you need to improve."

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ROSELYNMONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Weekend Warriors

The closest thing to "firing" a gun I have ever experienced was when I played "Royal Rampage," an online game that has former U.S. president George W. Bush and Queen Elizabeth trading fire with terrorists attacking London.

So when we had our story conference for TAGA *Sports*' first issue for 2015, I pitched a story on airsoft so I could graduate from "mouse" firing and get a little closer to the "real" thing.

Airsoft, according to Wikipedia, is a game in which participants eliminate opponents by hitting each other with spherical non-metallic pellets called "BBs" and launched via replica firearms called Airsoft guns. It originated in China in the 1960's and spread to other countries, especially in Asia. Airsoft has also reached Saipan with a group called

play at shoot 'em up

STAG (Saipan Tactical Airsoft Group) conducting games once a week.

One Sunday afternoon I tagged along with STAG members to feel how it's like to pull that trigger and be in a "battlefield."

GETTING IN GEAR

Our "battlefield" was, for the moment, the former La Fiesta Mall. I came in faded jeans, light blue shirt, and rubber shoes. Wrong selections, I would learn later, to my grief.

The "Weekend Warriors" (that's how STAG president Edwin Sta. Theresa called the group's members) were in dark pants and shirts, some were in camouflage and others were in battle dress uniforms (BDUs), and all wore combat boots.

Squad leader Brian Elayda supplied me with the rest of the protective gear requirement: tactical vest, facemask, helmet, neck scarf, and full seal goggles. Gloves, knee pads, and chest rig are optional.

"You need a neck scarf because it really hurts when you get hit there," Elayda warned.

SAFETY FIRST

While loading their guns, Elayda and Sta. Theresa alternately briefed me on the safety rules: Always lock the trigger when not in use; bring down the gun muzzle when not

firing; don't go to the battlefield without protective gear; and don't fire at someone whose hands are up.

WEAPONS

After parking, I saw guys pushing large pieces of luggage walking toward the La Fiesta Mall. I thought I was in the wrong place. I was not. Inside those luggage were Airsoft guns—M16, M14, AK 47 replicas and pistols—and their accessories and other supplies (scope and mounts, extra magazine, BBs). I could not recall the names of the other weapons, but I remembered Sta. Theresa telling me these guns are either powered by batteries called "Li-Po" or gas (propane).

Elayda said the longer the rifles are and the slower the BBs' velocity, the harder they hit the target. The long rifles weigh between 8 to 10 lbs and it takes people awhile (especially newcomers like me) to get used to carrying and firing them. I did practice shooting and lost several rounds, with those beer and soda cans standings just several feet away from me still up.

I was handed a pistol next and the novice in me showed as the recoil almost made me drop the handgun. Hitting a long target using the pistol was also a bit hard. Both Elayda and Sta. Theresa said they only use pistols as backups and for shooting practices.

I tried the third weapon, a sturdy M4—shorter and lighter—and I found my match. Rounds are fired faster at about 15 BBs per second and easy to hold while eyeing your target.

STAG holds regular target shooting competition to improve members' marksmanship using different guns.

GAME TIME

Sta. Theresa was the game master that weekend. He divided members into two groups of seven (each team can have as many as 10 members, depending on how many show up every Sunday and the multiple games usually finish early in the afternoon).

The name of the game was "dead match" where opposing teams attack each other without needing to hide in empty rooms and other spots at La Fiesta.

At the "battlefield," broken glasses, chairs, tables, and old equipment left behind are everywhere. Imagine a condemned building where the bad guys in movies usually hide their victims and you get the picture. Since the "Weekend Warriors" are not allowed to hide in rooms, the building posts on the second floor of La Fiesta and debris scattered around the "battlefield" served as covers.

The team that has the most men left after 15 minutes wins. One man is out if he is hit knee up and elbow up. A game is played for two 15-minute segments, with teams switching sides once the half-hour cutoff lapses. Switching is done for balance as the right side of the battlefield gives one team a good vantage point when attacking.

Opposing teams lined up near the hand grills and, at the count of three, they quickly sought cover and soon shots came from left to right and vice versa. I stood in the middle as per Sta. Theresa's instructions so I can observe the fight, but left just a few minutes later after getting hit twice.

Elayda and his group were on the right side and he commanded his men to move in and get into good positions while he fired shots at their opponents to protect his squad. His team won and prevailed again after the switch.

The "Weekend Warriors" took a break for 10 minutes before resuming another game, this time allowing them to hide in the empty rooms and even go up to the third floor of La Fiesta. Same time limit, but this time more men per team and each squad now has a sniper.

I joined Elayda's team and he also became my buddy.

"We usually assign a veteran member to a newcomer to protect and guide the latter while in battle," Sta. Theresa said.

We were assigned to the left side of the "battlefield" and another member, Rodel, joined me and Elayda in one of the empty rooms. In between fire exchanges, Rodel reminded me to peek quickly at the opposing side and then fire.

"If you peek slowly, you may get hit often, as a veteran rifleman is just waiting for you to get out of cover and boom. It's easy to dodge 'bullets' when you do a quick look. You also need to look at all points because bullets will come from everywhere in this setting," Rodel said.

A few minutes after the pep talk with Rodel and without firing even a single shot, I was hit on the lower right thigh. I was out with a small round mark left on my thigh as a memento.

Our opponent did not know I was hit and this happens often so in this game, the "Weekend Warriors" count on each other's honesty.

My team eventually lost and Sta. Theresa thought I was done for the day. He was wrong. I can't leave without being able to fire my gun and, if I 'm lucky, hit someone.

"When you're hit once, it may hurt a bit, but

that will not stop you from fighting back. You'll be more determined the next time you get out there," Manny, another STAG member, said while reloading his gun and showing me a dark mark left by the BB on his right arm. "This will last for a few days, but I'll be fine."

We switched sides and my teammates went on the attack mode with our sniper Ron in his camouflage hiding in the growing vegetation in La Fiesta and hitting two men in the process. Midway through the game, I fired my first rounds at the guy on the third floor, as per the tip from our spotter. I missed the target and kept firing, to no avail, while my teammates managed to move in and bring down some of our opponents.

Just a few minutes before we wrapped up the game, no one had yet managed to hit me, or so I thought. I would have been down earlier if not for that "glaring" sky blue shirt and red keffiyeh I wore.

Juanito, the opposing team's sniper, I found out was on the roof of the third floor and brought down Ron. He also saw me at close range, but remembered Sta. Theresa's earlier instruction "to be careful" when firing at a "reporter."

Sta. Theresa later told me STAG members are not allowed to hit an opponent at close range (around 10 feet or less).

"It's for safety purposes. When at close range and especially in CQB [close quarter combat], one just needs to say 'hit' instead of firing to bring down an opponent," Sta. Theresa said.

AIRSOFT HIGHS

So what does Airsoft do for around 100 STAG members?

"Like any other sport/game/hobby, Airsoft gives you timeout from you daily grind. It gives you something to look forward to on the weekend after working your butts off from Monday to Friday and even Saturday," said Elayda, who works as a technical staff at Sand Castle.

While Elayda values the time off work, others love the camaraderie, teamwork, fun, and communication developed among the "Weekend Warriors."

Members share food and water during breaks. They lend spare BBs, gear/equipment, and even guns to fellow members. Elayda and other members who know their way with guns help fix broken ones and make recommendations on what to buy.

They attend to members that are badly hit, always ready with their first aid kits. During breaks, they share tips on how to attack, while teasing guys who love to hide too long. They discuss strategies and are open to suggestions from each member.

"We spend a weekend of fun and brotherhood in a stress-relieving game," Sta. Theresa ended.

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Teach a man to fish

JIM RAYPHAND
Contributing Writer

Tyrone, a young friend of mine (former student-athlete whom I coached during his primary school days to be more precise), approached me at the beach the other day. "How are you, mister?" he said with a firm grip around my hand—happy to see me, I think, as I was to see him. I couldn't help but be a little nostalgic and my mind slipped back to a time of my more youthful days on our island shores.

As with most island boys of the '70s, my earliest heroes (favorite athletes, if you will) were fishermen and not the well-to-do sports fishing enthusiasts, but rather the subsistence fishermen who toiled daily in our atoll oceans, dropping lines off their wooden canoes and diving beneath them with spears in hand. Most of them are long gone now—legends of their time—but images of them coming ashore with fish dangling around their waists or of them tossing a day's catch onto our sea-wall are still very vivid in the broken pieces of my childhood memories. Tyrone looks like so many of them did except with a clean Lifeguard shirt and shorts in place of a tattered *thuu*.

Some of the most exciting and the most horrifying experiences I had as a pubescent kid came at the hands of old, salty dog coaches, my uncles and such, who thought it best to teach me not to be afraid of the ocean by scaring the crap out of me anytime I was in it.

On one of my earliest offshore fishing trips (I was the designated bailer), I made the mistake of whimpering when a shark nearly as big as our canoe swam below us. Long story short, I was thrown into the water with it, so I never cried on the canoe again—there is no crying in fishing—and I learned how to swim that day. The logic, I suppose, was to face one's fears (or was it respect the ocean, but don't fear it?). Whatever it was, the jury is still out on whether I actually learned anything. What was clear is that I would never amount to any kind of "real man" if I didn't know how to fish. Again, the jury is still out, though I rarely miss a good catch from the roadside fish markets.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

A fisherman with his catch. Inset, Sommer Gomez shows off her catch.

The saying goes, "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day, but teach him how to fish and he'll eat for a lifetime." And so fishing, for island boys, is a rite of passage into manhood; in fact, it was customary that when a young man sought the hand of a girl in marriage he would need to show, among other life skills, that he was capable of catching fish…at least it was when I was coming of age.

Emphasis on teaching the men versus women who, generally, weren't allowed to fish (and to my knowledge still aren't in some of our island cultures). We never questioned it, but we knew that as we grew older our sisters and such would find themselves deeper into the backs of our makeshift cookhouses and the boys would venture farther and farther outside the reef. I won't elaborate on what time of the month women should never go anywhere near their men or their boats, but let's just say that island fishermen live by certain rules—not my rules, just what I grew up knowing. But, I digress.

The original island athletes were seafaring swimmers and tree climbers—the guys who could paddle for hours offshore and then spend the day free-diving into the dark blue for 2-3 minutes at a time stalking fish at the bottom of the sea. The same guys who on any given day might be found 10 stories up without a net on our coconut and breadfruit trees—always on the hunt to keep the family fed. These were the real men of our islands.

Times have changed since my younger days as an aspiring fisherman, but the ocean still beckons with that ever-elusive catch of a lifetime. May the blood of our forefathers run strong in the veins of young bucks like Tyrone, the latest generation of our island athletes.

It's good to see some of them making a living on our beaches and such. Though I suspect most of them are in on the secret that a fisherman heading off to "work" at the beach is something more akin to an athlete taking the field on game day than it is a coal-miner going underground. Sure it can be exhausting, but "please don't take me out, coach."

MARPAC

has the CNMI sports teams' back

ROSELYN MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

ROSELYN MONROYO

National Elite Academy selected players, former NMIFA technical director Johann Noetzel and Saipan Soccer School's Ruselle Zapanta pose for a photo before the start of the Choco Milk Cup at the Koblerville Elementary School Field.

It's a new year and the season of gift-giving may be over for some but not for Marianas Pacific Distributor, Inc, which supports a lot of events and organizations yearlong.

Sports associations are among the beneficiaries of MARPAC's generosity. The company extends a helping hand to soccer, football, baseball/softball basketball, golf, bowling, fishing, billiards, and darts.

"We will do our best to continue supporting these sports organizations and other activities in the CNMI," said Tom Basa, sales manager of MARPAC's consumer products division.

In soccer, MARPAC has been in partnership with Northern Mariana Islands Football Association for more than two years, as the company is one of the main sponsors of the Choco Milk Cup, an annual competition under NMIFA's National Elite Academy.

NEA and Choco Milk Cup highlight

ROSELYN MONROYO

MARPAC manager for consumer products Tom Basa, second left, NMIFA general secretary Ross Zapanta, left, and CNMI coach and NMIFA technical director Kiyoshi Sekiguchi, second right, join participants of the National Elite Academy for a group photo at the TSL Sports Complex.

selected U12 players who are training for specific periods and playing against each other. Basa said they decided to support NEA and its program because of Pancho Pantera, an animated character featured in the label of Choco Milk.

"When we first brought Choco Milk in the CNMI, Pancho Pantera was dressed in a soccer uniform and kicking the ball, so we felt like it's a good timing to promote the product through the help of NMIFA's NEA. Pancho Pantera is into sports and Choco Milk helps him get the needed vitamins and minerals to keep playing and stay active," said Basa, whose own children are also into soccer.

"I have two boys—Tyshawn and Tyrone—who play for Matansa Football Club as a forward and defender. I love seeing them with all those energy they show on the field and the discipline they develop as they play and compete," Basa said.

Another youth program MARPAC support is the U18 division of the Commonwealth Football League.

James Lee, sales manager for beverage and tobacco division, said they donate drinks for CFL's fundraisers. CFL's Sharks got help from MARPAC too when the former hosted Guam in a friendly game late this year and during the team's off-island match against the PH Punishers.

MARPAC also backed basketball and baseball teams that went to Pohnpei for the 8th Micronesian Games in 2014 and this year, they are expected to support the CNMI's campaign in the Pacific Games in Papua New Guinea.

"This year, we're hoping to coordinate with one head group so everyone in Team Marianas will get help," Lee said.

As for billiards and darts, Lee said their partnership with the Saipan Billiards Association and Saipan Electronic Darts Association just gets stronger.

"We've been sponsoring their yearlong tournaments and their banquets for more than 10 years and providing giveaways to winners," Lee said.

MARPAC has also maintained its team-up with Saipan Bowling Association, which hold the monthly Budweiser King and Queen of the Lanes tournaments, the May Masters, and a season-ending competition. The same goes with the Saipan Fishermen Association, which hosts the Saipan International Fishing Tournament, and the Tournament of Champions.

"For softball, we've been working with Chamolinian Softball Association for the past two years and we're looking forward to meeting the organization's new leaders so we can resume the partnership," Lee said.

He added that MARPAC will host exciting events in the first quarter of this year.

"We will have the Super Bowl in February. We will choose about 50 people and they can watch Super Bowl at Naked Fish for free (food and drinks) and each person can bring one individual with him. It's going to be a lot of fun with giveaways and cash prizes at stake in that big event," Lee said.

MARPAC's second offering is "Up for Whatever." Lee declined to give details about this promotion, but hinted that the lucky ones get to do unexpected things.

"We could ask one to go parasailing with us and other fun things," Lee said. TS

ROSELYN MONROYO

ROSELYN MONROYO

TOP PHOTO: MARPAC manager for beverage and tobacco James Lee accepts the plaque of appreciation from Pacific Amusement, Inc.'s Cecile Vivero. **TOP PHOTO:** A local fisherman shows off his catch during the MARPAC-sponsored Saipan Fishermen Association International Fishing Tournament.

TAMIKO WINKFIELD

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Tamiko Winkfield seems to be equally at home shaping young minds in the classroom as she was making waves in the water.

The former CNMI national swimmer is now a teacher at Saipan Community School and Winkfield says the discipline and the lessons the sport taught her has come handy in her occupation as an educator.

The youngest daughter of Bobby and Debbie Winkfield said she got into swimming because it was basically a family thing.

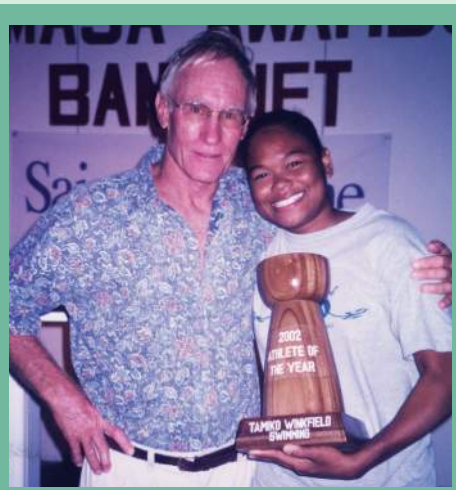
"I got into swimming because of my family. My older brother Jacoby started swimming when he was 10. We are five years apart so I started learning to swim with the summer American Red Cross swim lessons when I was 5. I joined the swim team by the time I was 7. I had passed all seven levels and was invited to start swimming. Swimming was also a family affair. My sister and little brother began swimming too. We were all going the same way, so we did everything together—school, swimming, anything. My [older] brother led the way."

Swimming brought Winfield many accomplishments, not because of the many medals she won or the meets she came in first place but because of the people she shared it with.

"Saipan Swim Club was an amazing experience because we were family and we supported each other in everything. Any accomplishment I had was because of a great team, awesome coaches (Mr. and Mrs. Sakovich, Mr. Winkfield, and water polo coaches Kevin Seely and Colin Thompson), and amazing parents and siblings."

The Mr. and Mrs. Sakovich Winfield was referring to are CNMI Sports Hall of Famers Bill and Jean Sakovich, the founders and first coaches of the SSC.

For the record, just some of the accomplishments Winkfield achieved when she swam competitively were Student Athlete of the Year, Athlete of the Year, national distance freestyle records, Micronesian Games medal winner, and South Pacific Games medal winner.



Counterclockwise: Tamiko Winkfield makes big thumbs up sign after a recent open water swim; growing up, swimming was a family affair for Winkfield, she is seen here posing with Saipan Swim Club founder and coach Bill Sakovich after winning the 2002 Athlete of the Year from NMASA; Winfield, second from right, poses with, from left, siblings Jacoby, Audrey, and Jeremy.

Aside from these accolades, Winfield served as a kind of ambassador for the CNMI in countries all over the world for swimming competitions.

"My most memorable experience I had in swimming was my first Micronesian Games in Palau (1998). I just missed the podium by one in the open water swim, but it was the first time I traveled with my older brother and sister and it was amazing to be on the same team and to swim for the CNMI. It was also the first time I had actually swum in the same open age group as my sister. We were competing against each other and it was great because I looked up to her so much. She was a distance swimmer, too. I was proud to follow in her footsteps."

Winkfield also admits that the SSC was not only a club but also a family and even though she hasn't seen her former teammates in years, they still keep in touch, thanks to social media.

"Saipan Swim Club is more than a team. We are a family. We all keep in touch as much as we can. Mr. and Mrs. Sakovich instilled in us the importance of networking and keeping in touch. They know where we all are and we share news with each other whenever we can."

With her swimming career behind her, Winkfield now focuses her energy on becoming a good teacher at the Susupe private school where she has a full plate.

"I am a teacher at Saipan Community School. I teach elementary and junior high Art, junior high ukulele music program, and junior high Bible. I am living out my dream. I always wanted to be a teacher because I love learning and I love seeing my students learn. I get to see that every day. The students at Saipan Community School are an exceptional bunch and I am so glad I get to be in their lives."

She, however, acknowledges that despite her being semi-retired from the sport she loves, swimming remains a huge part of her life—she was and still remains a swimmer and an athlete.

"I do not swim competitively, but the water is so important to me, so I go to the beach when I can. I love most sports, though. I played basketball in college, I've dabbled with volleyball, I've played water polo, and I've done some track and field. I've done some training with GetFitCNMI while I was paddling with the Johnsons. I have done a few triathlons and was a swimmer for Tagaman and XTERRA. I was also an orange belt in Aikido when it was still here on island. Let's just say I like sports!"

Asked what she can impart to the youth or to the young-at-heart who want to dabble in swimming, Winkfield said it's best to surround yourself with people who share the passion for the sport.

"The greatest advice I can give to aspiring swimmers is to find and surround yourself with people who will encourage you and challenge you to stay committed to the hard decision of being a swimmer. Swimming requires determination and a strong mind. Looking at the bottom of a pool six days a week is hard if you do not have a vision of success. You are working hard to see how far you can take the body that God gave you and do your best!"

JONPEREZ
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Dr. John Joyner challenges preconceptions of aging

Hardly anyone remembers it now but Dr. John Joyner once represented the CNMI in the Mr. Universe bodybuilding competition.

Yep, you heard that right. Joyner, who had been residing on Saipan for almost 20 years by then, competed and reached the semifinals in the 1995 Mr. Universe.

He recounted that he had already won a number of bodybuilding competitions on Saipan by then. At the time, Joyner was part of a federally funded group that arrived in the CNMI in the '70s to establish educational programs in Micronesia.

"When I came out here, I didn't know anything about bodybuilding. But for most of my life I've been physically fit. I've put in construction work as well. I said, let me try it," Joyner said. "Given the difference in my body with the others at that time, I won. That was in 1984 on Saipan and there were two others."

So when Guam hosted the Mr. Universe competition, he was just at the right place at the right time.

"In 1995 the Mr. Universe was going to be held in Guam and I went to represent the CNMI. I was saying, 'Mr. Universe, come on!'" Joyner said with a laugh. "But I was fortunate to be able to get into the semifinals before I got eliminated."

He added that he went up against professional bodybuilders. "They were all buff. But it was a fun experience. It is one of the experiences that I treasure."

Joyner has been physically active for most of his life as he believes it is an essential part of being human, like breathing and eating. That's why despite already pushing 90, he remains energetic and can still do things that some people his age have difficulty doing.

"Being active physically is important in our lives. Walking alone is a physical activity," said Joyner, who decided to quit his job in Washington and returned to live on Saipan.

Seeing what the almost 90-year-old Joyner can still do is actually surprising. In a demonstration of his still considerable prowess, he went toe-to-toe with one of his students in a one-on-one physical challenge.

Joyner did 50 push-ups, one more than his student. He exhibited his flexibility by doing a full split where he even touched the floor with his chin. It was a draw in arm wrestling as both showed strength.

"I started with martial arts, I have my belts. I've done taekwondo, Shotokan and kick boxing. That gave me the flexibility and taught me discipline," said Joyner, who ran the early childhood education programs for the federal government for all of Micronesia.

Joyner said being involved in physical activity also contributes to human growth, with both the mind and body working as one to achieve things.

"Focus must be given to mind and body. Those two things are not separate and must work together. We need to think in order to achieve," said Joyner. "The mind is the most powerful tool in one person. If you focus on the being part, the doing follows.

"What we tend to forget is physical activity is an essential part of the lives of every human being. It is an instinct since from the time when we're born we learn to kick our legs while we lay on our backs, then we learn to crawl, up to the time we learn how to walk, there's physical activity involved."

Physical activity is also part of man's natural equipment, he says. "As we grow, we simply transform from one form to another. We don't stop from being who we are. We just simply transform. Baby, toddler, child, teenager, young adult. It is all a transformation." TG

John Joyner poses for the judges when he represented the CNMI in the 1995 Mr. Universe in Guam. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

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